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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to define HETFIRE (the title of a report by the Higher Education Task Force on Improvement and Reform in American Education), and to identify and discuss the key elements contained in HETFIRE. The task force was established in 1972 to determine and conceptualize the best thinking of the higher education teacher education community concerning the reform of American education. The report presented the following three recommendations: (1) accelerated educational reform; (2) creation of personnel development centers; and (3) partnership or shared responsibility in teacher education. The report suggested a number of significant issues, three of which are examined and challenged in this paper. This paper states that the questions of the purposes which formal schooling should serve is completely ignored in HETFIRE; hence we continue to retain and support a conservative, subject-matter centered, alienating form of education. The paper also disagrees with HETFIRE's suggestion that university professors move into the realm of pragmatic problem solving in the schools. Instead of its confusing the roles of theoreticians and practitioners, the paper suggests that the HETFIRE report should have urged the continued need and support for educational theoreticians at all institutions preparing teachers. The paper also disagrees with HETFIRE's advocacy of giving equal power to teachers, school administrators, community groups, representatives of industry, and interested lay people. (BD)

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HETFIRE: REACTIONS TO A GRAND SCHEME

What is Hetfire? What are the key elements contained in Hetfire? What is the likely import of these elements for Teacher Education? The purpose of this paper is to provide responses to these questions.

Let us begin by examining the acronym HETFIRE. This symbol refers to the title of the Report of the Higher Education Task Force on Improvement and Reform in American Education which was released late in 1973. Established in January, 1972, this Task Force consisted of twelve educators, ten administrators in higher education and two professors. They were commissioned by the United States Office of Education, but identified and appointed jointly by the USOE and the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education. The purpose of the Task Force was to determine and conceptualize the best thinking of the higher education teacher education community concerning the reform of American education. In their report, however, they revealed a reluctance to proclaim themselves the voice of higher education. Instead, they chose to report their views as their collective opinions, based upon a consensual commitment to cultural pluralism and local autonomy, with the hope that such a venture would provoke others to analyze and assess the quality of their thinking. What were the significant elements contained in their report?

There were three: 1. accelerated educational reform, 2. personnel development centers, and 3. partnership in teacher education. Let me briefly describe each of these elements. The need to reform American education is a theme which permeates the report. Commencing with a solid Darwinian assertion that "this is a time of survival of the fittest,"[1] the report vaguely touches on the sources

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[1] Denemark, George W. and Yff, Joost, Obligation For Reform, The Final Report of the Higher Education Task Force on Improvement and Reform in American Education, Washington, D.C.: American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, January, 1974, p. 1.

of these demands for reform. It distinguishes between "repair," "revolution" and "accelerated reform." It rejects "repair" as simply useless tinkering, and "revolution" because "it contradicts all that is known to be good about one of the most highly developed and effective education systems in the world."[2] It emphasizes "accelerated reform," which is characterized as a "reasoned and rational approach to improvement."[3]

Personnel development center represents a construct developed and employed by the Task Force to facilitate the achievement of accelerated reform.[4] A Center, the Task Force stresses, is "not to be construed as a new place, but as a new set of interrelationships among people that would operate in an existing or combination of existing locations."[5] (emphasis mine) That is to say, a variety of people concerned with the quality of teacher preparation, and the reform of American education would be engaged in the Center. These people would form new "symbiotic relationships" with one another.

Out of these relationships would emerge the third basic element of the proposal, shared responsibility, a partnership, in teacher education. Here the Task Force has chosen to adopt a value position in which they assert the need to change the relationships between institutions of higher education engaged in preparing teachers, and a variety of other public groups and agencies. Power to make decisions, to develop and to implement programs of teacher education, would be transferred from existing structures to institutions operated on a collaborative basis.

HETFIRE, then, is a report, commissioned by an agency of the federal

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[2]Ibid., p. 2.

[3]Ibid., p. 3.

[4]This construct is very similar to the "The Training Complex," chapter 8, in Teachers For The Real World by B. Othanel Smith, et. al., Washington, D.C.: American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, December, 1968.

[5]Denemark, op. cit., p. 39.

government (USOE), which strongly recommends that three changes be made in teacher education in order to reform American education - reform should be accelerated, personnel development centers should be established and decision-making responsibilities should be shared.

There are many attributes of this report which deserve vigorous examination. I shall confine myself to three: educational purpose (value), theory and practice, and institutional autonomy.

Educational Purpose (Value)

What stands out most clearly about this report is the faith which the members of the Task Force continue to have that any problems in formal schooling can be solved and any reform effected if only we recognize and create new entities, e.g., a new organizational system like a Personnel Development Center; or if we place immediate control of teacher education in the hands of the local community, e.g., by emphasizing "shared responsibility;" or if the methodological system to be employed would be based upon the tenets of performance based teacher education, a management-oriented, didactic, conservative, extrinsically controlled, essentialistic approach to classroom teaching.

Both the proposed organizational system and the methodological system stress the employment of systems analysis with its input-output cybernetic feedback arrangements, quality-controls and efficiency aims. Presumably the McNamara conception of a Program-Planning-Budgeting System for assessing the cost-effectiveness of programs would be employed to evaluate both the organizational and the methodological aspects of this scheme. Both frameworks, organization and methodology, perceive the student as a product to be molded and shaped from without via formal schooling. Both stress those values and attitudes most closely allied with our industrial system. Both reveal the accuracy of the contention of Michael B. Katz who concluded from his work that the primary purpose of schools in American society

has always been the transmission of the dominant social and economic values.

Consequently, it is important to ask a strategic question - one which is deceptively simple and yet one which must be asked about all efforts to induce change and reform in a rational and reasoned fashion. The question is, what are the purposes which formal schooling should serve? The question of purpose is ignored completely in HETFIRE. One can only conclude that rather than being a reasoned approach to achievement of reform in American education, it is an aimless, mindless messing around and re-ordering of the elements contained in the present situation.[7] All at the expense of carefully delineated, commonly agreed upon ends.

We have had a history of such reform efforts in American education since the significant study by Joseph M. Rice in the late 19th century.[8] For the most part little or nothing has come of these efforts because we did not come to any kind of agreement among ourselves about the purposes which education ought to serve. Hence we continue to retain and support a conservative, subject-matter centered, alienating form of schooling throughout our country.

The issue I am raising here is one of the most important questions in American education today - the question of purposes (values) of education. HETFIRE does nothing to resolve this matter.

Theory-Practice

The suggestion within HETFIRE that university professors, especially professors of education, move into the realm of pragmatic problem solving in the schools

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[6]Katz, Michael B., Class, Bureaucracy and Schools: The Illusion of Change in American Education, New York: Praeger, 1971.

[7]It is conceivable, of course, that the purposes of HETFIRE have been determined by decision-making within "inner circles," and that HETFIRE constitutes an effort to persuade others to agree and support. An interesting analysis of this form of inquiry and persuasion can be found in ETHICS, Vol. LXII, No. 2, January, 1952, "Philosophy and Action" by Richard McKeon, pp. 79-100.

[8]Rice, Joseph M., The Public School System of the United States, New York: Century Company, 1893.

is very much like suggesting that design engineers leave their work tables, move to the assembly line and commence dealing directly with the practical problems of tool usage and maintenance, product assembly and production techniques. The operational procedures and management of educational programs is the job of classroom teachers, school administrators and supervisors, not of university professors.

One can surmise that this problem may have emerged because of an imprecise use of the term "Education."[9] Two meanings have been attached to it by a variety of thinkers: 1. a practical connotation, which stresses the activity of teaching itself, e.g., selection of subject matter, selection of methods and experiences, facilitating human relations and evaluating the work of children in a formal learning environment; and 2. reflectively thinking about education in general in which we develop principles, theories and organized knowledge about "Education."[10]

By confusing the roles of theoreticians and practitioners, HETFIRE tends to advocate a dangerous path for American education to follow. When an individual becomes engaged in identifying faults and creating remedies in school curricula, methodology and organization, it tends to take all of one's time, energy and attention.

HETFIRE's failure to recognize such outcomes, and what would happen if those professors engaged in research, theory development, and dissemination of thought relative to formal schooling were to be forced into different roles and made to engage in the practical, classroom problems of institutional maintenance and management represents a most serious problem. Sarratt emphasizes this matter when he

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[9]Another reason could be the ubiquitous suggestion, especially prevalent among faculty in the liberal arts, that professors of education are primarily responsible for the lack of responsiveness of the schools to change. This is patent nonsense. Harry S. Broudy puts this argument to rest in The Real World of the Public Schools, New York: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1972. This is a book which all teacher educators ought to examine thoroughly.

[10]Frankena, William K., Philosophy of Education, New York: Macmillan Co., 1965, p. 2.

states:

> "I speak from experience, for I left the university to go into a high school and engage in such front-line reform and improvement. The cultural shock was severe. I realized, after the first few days, that most of my time had to be devoted to the daily problems of political negotiation with parents, faculty and students, not to mention financial auditors. I also realized, on the other hand, my need for stimulation from my former colleagues in curriculum theory to broaden my vision, to look at alternative approaches, ... It seems, however, that either one is going to be a theorist or a practitioner. Occupying some middle position, ... just will not work...."[11]

While I recognize the accuracy of HETFIRE's position relative to some of the shortcomings in programs designed to prepare teachers, I vigorously oppose its recommendations that university professors of education ought to abandon their work on theory and theory dissemination and devote their time, attention and energy to the practical realm of the classroom.

The report would have been much more significant if it had urged the continued need and support for educational theoreticians at all institutions preparing teachers. It is not too much theory that the teachers in our schools today possess - rather, it is far too little. We have been, in far too many instances, satisfied with preparing teachers as technicians rather than as thoughtful, ends-means oriented, educators. Teaching is far too important to be left in such hands. I am very much afraid that if HETFIRE is implemented, however, this condition can only be exacerbated.

Institutional Autonomy

The literature has begun to reveal a strong emphasis on the need to entrust

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[11] Sarratt, Robert J., "Curriculum Theory: Controversy, Challenge, and Future Concerns," in Heightened Consciousness, Cultural Revolution, and Curriculum Theory by William Pinar, Editor, Berkeley, Calif.: McCutchan Publishing Corp., 1974, p. 26.

greater power to teachers, school administrators, various community groups, representatives of industry and interested lay people in the regulation of American Education. This emphasis has led to the emergence of what is coming to be called PARITY.[12] The essential attribute of this concept is the delegation of the intellectual responsibilities of scholars to determine the ends and means within their chosen disciplines to individuals and groups who have had no formal preparation or experience in these disciplines. HETFIRE employs such phrases as "synergy of concerned individuals," "symbiotic relationship," "openness in partnership," "a people partnership," "equal relationships," and "shared responsibility," to describe its intentions in this regard. I believe that dialogue, consultation, discussion and reasoned debate with groups interested in teacher education would be one thing - very important and very good, indeed - and something which perceptive, open-minded teacher educators have been doing for years. Allocating to them the power to decide matters of scholarship and preparation by "equal vote," however, is something else altogether. PARITY represents a direct attack by societal groups on the principle that a university is a community of scholars not in quest of power, but in quest of truth and the unrestricted right to seek clear understandings of the phenomena with which they are concerned. Acceptance of this concept in any form is bound to reinstate a system of intellectual tyranny which ultimately must have serious consequences for the freedom of university faculty to think, inquire and teach. We must always remember that the ultimate purpose of the university is to provide the intellectual, moral and aesthetic leadership without which a civilization would surely flounder. HETFIRE denies this with its stress on equivalent responsibility through PARITY. This concept ought to be firmly resisted by all

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[12] McCarty, Donald J. et. al., New Perspectives on Teacher Education, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1973, see especially the final chapter for a treatment of the source of this concept, as well as some interesting revelations about the experience of the personnel in the U.S.O.E.

thoughtful educators, professional organizations and others interested in the viability of our civilization.

Summary

HETFIRE is the title of a report submitted to the United States Office of Education by a Higher Education Task Force on Improvement and Reform in American Education. It recommends that 1. reform be accelerated, 2. personnel development centers be created, and 3. responsibility be shared as ways to improve teacher education. The report suggested a number of significant issues, three of which were examined in this article: educational purpose (value), theory-practice, and institutional autonomy.